14. GARUDA PURANA

I. INTRODUCTION

LORD VISHNU'S INCARNATIONS

Sutji once reached Naimisharanya in course of his pilgrimage. There he found numerous sages engaged in austerities and penance. All of them were delighted to find Sutji in their midst and considered it as a God sent opportunity to get their doubts related with religious topics cleared. Sage Shaunak was also present there and he asked Sutji -- 'O revered sage! Who is the creator of this world? Who nurtures it and who annihilates it in the end? How can one realize the supreme Almighty? How many incarnations the Almighty has taken till now? Please enlighten us on all these things, which are shrouded in mystery.'

Sutji replied-- 'I am going to reveal to you the contents of Garuda Purana, which contains the divine tales of Lord Vishnu. This particular Purana is named after Garuda because he was the one who first narrated these tales to sage Kashyap. Kashyap subsequently narrated them to Sage Vyasa. I came to know about these divine tales from Sage Vyasa. Lord Vishnu is the supreme almighty and the source of all creations. He is the nurturer of this world and the annihilator as well. Though he is beyond the bondage of birth and death yet he takes incarnations to protect the world from the tyranny of sinners. His first incarnation was in the form of the eternal adolescent Sanatkumar and others who were all celibates and extremely virtuous.'

'Lord Vishnu took his second incarnation in the form of a boar (Varaha) to protect the Earth from the mighty demon named Hiranyaksha, who had abducted her to Patal loka (Nether world). In his third incarnation as Narada, he propagated the virtues of 'nishkam karma' (performing one's duties without bothering about the results). In his fourth incarnation as Nar-Narayan, he performed arduous austerities for the protection and propagation of Dharma or religiousness.

Lord Vishnu's fifth incarnation was as Kapil, which he took to protect the Sankhya shashtra, which was on the verge of becoming extinct. He took his sixth incarnation in the house of Atri and Anusuya as Dattatreya with the specific objective of propagating the most secret Brahma vidya to worthy people. His disciples included virtuous souls like Prahalad and others. Lord Vishnu took his seventh incarnation as the son of Ruchi Prajapati and Akuti and was known as Yagya deva. His eighth incarnation was as Rishabh deva- the son of Sage Nabhi and Merudevi.

In this incarnation he established the norms for Grihashtha ashram, which later on became the guidelines for every householders. Lord Vishnu took his ninth incarnation as Prithu and 'milked' (extracted) various nutrients (cereals, pulses etc.) from the Earth who had disguised herself as a cow and thus protected the populace from getting starved to death.

In his tenth incarnation as Matsya (fish), he protected the life of Vaivaswat Manu, who would not have survived otherwise. Lord Vishnu took his eleventh incarnation in the form of a tortoise (kurma) and held the Mandarachal mountain on his back at the time when the ocean was being churned. His twelfth incarnation was as Dhanvantari and thirteenth as the most enchanting beauty- Mohini to retrieve the ambrosia pot from the possession of the demons. He subsequently distributed it among the deities as the result of which they became immortal.

In his fourteenth incarnation, Lord Vishnu manifested himself as 'Nrisimha' (partly human and partly lion) and to protect his devotee- Prahlad killed the wicked demon Hiranyakashipu by tearing apart his abdomen with his sharp claws. His fifteenth incarnation was as Vaman (dwarf) in which he demanded all the three worlds from Bali-the most benevolent demon king and then sent him to Patal loka. In his sixteenth incarnation as Parshuram, he wiped out the whole caste of kshatriyas from the face of the earth for twenty-one times, as they had all become immoral.

In his seventeenth incarnation he was born as Vyasa to Parashar and Satyavati and accomplished his mission of propagating the knowledge of Vedas by categorizing them into four parts. In his eighteenth incarnation he manifested himself as Sri Ram. His nineteenth incarnation was as Krishna and his twentieth incarnation as Balram. He will take his twenty-first incarnation as Buddha to bring the mankind back to virtuous path by preaching against the rituals and proving that it is not proper for a seeker to get bound by them. Lord Vishnu would take incarnation as Kalki and will be born to a Brahmin named Vishnuyasha to liberate the earth from the sinners.'

HOW GARUDA PURANA WAS PROPAGATED

On being asked by the sages as to how did he come to know about the contents of Garuda Purana, Sutji told them--'Once, I had gone to Badrikashram, where I met Sage Vyasa. I requested him to enlighten me on various spiritual matters to which he agreed saying that he was going to narrate the tales of Garuda Purana which was first told by Lord Brahma to Narada, Daksha Prajapati and myself. Sage Vyasa then told Sutji how once he along with Narada, Daksha and Bhrigu had gone to Brahma loka to see Lord Brahma. After reaching there, all three of them requested Lord Brahma to shed light on the essence of the real knowledge.

Lord Brahma revealed to them that Garuda Purana contained the essence of all the scriptures and Lord Vishnu himself had narrated its divine tales to him (Brahma). Describing the incident when Lord Vishnu had told the divine tales of Garuda Purana to him as well as Shiva, Lord Brahma said-- 'I once went to Kailash mountain accompanied by Indra and other deities. We found Shiva engrossed in his meditation. We were amazed and asked him as to who was he meditating upon.

Lord Shiva told us that he was meditating upon the omnipresent, omniscient and the omnipotent Vishnu- in whom the entire universe exists. Lord Shiva also revealed to us that this was all he knew of Vishnu's power and also that if we wanted to know more about him then we will have to ask Lord Vishnu himself. So, all of us including Shiva went to Vishnu loka and requested Lord Vishnu to clear our doubts on various topics which confused us. Lord Vishnu gave a long discourse covering all the major religious topics.

LORD VISHNU REVEALS HIS OMNIPOTENT NATURE

Dwelling on length about his power, Lord Vishnu told Shiva— 'O Rudra! I am the lord of all the deities. I am the one who controls each and every event that occurs in the Universe. I am the one whom mortals worship with the desire of attaining salvation. The universe would have ceased to exist but for me. I am the creator, the nurturer as well as the supreme annihilator. I manifest myself in the sacred mantras as well as their meanings. People meditate on me. Matter is nothing but a medium through which I manifest myself.'

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LORD VISHNU BLESSES GARUDA

Describing how Garuda pleased him with his deep devotion, Lord Vishnu said— During ancient times Garuda once did an austere penance to

please me. I appeared before him and expressed my willingness to fulfil anything that he wished for. Garuda wanted to liberate his mother, Vinta from the slavery of Kadru-the mother of serpents. He also wanted to avenge his mother's humiliation at their hands. He also expressed his desire of becoming immortal by having a Purana credited to his name and finally he requested me to give him the privilege of becoming my mount. I blessed Garuda as the result of which all his wishes were fulfilled. Once, on being requested by sage Kashyap, Garuda narrated the divine tales of Garuda Purana to him. Sage Kashyap had once brought back a dead tree back to life with the help of Garudi Vidya- a sacred mantra found in Garuda Purana. Similarly, Garuda too had brought numerous dead creatures back to life with the help of same mantra.'

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THE BEGINNING OF CREATION

Lord Shiva requested Vishnu to shed light on different topics like Sarga (world), Pratisarga, Vansh (dynasties), Manvantar (fourteenth part of

Brahma's day) and Vanshanucharit (genealogy). Lord Vishnu replied— 'O Rudra! Lord Vasudeva in his incarnation of Nara-Narayan performs his responsibilities of the creator, protector as well as the annihilator. Each particle that is found in this universe whether perceptible or imperceptible is nothing but the medium through which the Almighty makes his presence felt. In the beginning of the creation, on account of His will subtle matter of nature (imperceptible) came into being. He is the one to whom 'Atma' or 'Purusha' owe its existence. Subsequently, intelligence or 'Buddhi' manifested itself from the subtle matter of nature, mind or 'Mun' from intelligence, space or 'Akash' from mind, air or 'Vayu' from Space, Fire or 'Teja' from air, water from 'Teja' and finally the earth manifested itself from water.'

'O Rudra! Then came into existence an enormous sized egg. I dwell within that egg and so do all the other deities. In fact, the whole universe is situated within that egg. The almighty Vishnu creates in the form of Brahma, nurtures in the form of Vishnu and annihilates in the form of Shiva at the end of each kalpa. The creations of the almighty are known as 'Sargas'. First of all, the almighty creates the Mahat tatva, which symbolizes his gross quality.

Since it was his first creation therefore it was called the first Sarga. The second Sarga consisted of the creation of the Panch-Tanmatras or the five basic elements- Earth (Prithvi), Water (Jala), Fire (Teja), Air (Vayu), and Sound (Shabda). These five basic elements are the stuffs from which matter is made. The third Sarga namely Vaikarik sarga comprising the creation of all the sense organs and the organs of the actions, is basically intelligence oriented, because the sense organs can not function without intelligence. All these above mentioned three sargas come under the category of Prakrit sarga or natural creation.' 'The fourth sarga is known as Mukhya sarga or the main creation and consisted of immovable things like mountains, trees, etc. The fifth Sarga is known as Tiryak sarga and consisted of animals and birds. The sixth sarga comprised the creation of the deities and other celestial beings and hence it is also known as Deva sarga. The seventh sarga comprised the creation of human beings and hence it was called Manush sarga. The eighth sarga, which is also called Anugrah sarga, consisted of creations that are both 'satvik' (pure) and 'tamasik' (dark) in nature. The ninth sarga is called Kaumar sarga.'

'Ford Brahma commenced his creation of supreme entities by expressing his will resulting into the manifestation of all the ten Manasputras. Subsequently, Ford Brahma created different other entities like deities (deva), demons (danav), ancestors (pitra) and human-beings (manushya). He then created the Ashuras from his thighs and subsequently abandoned his body. The dark qualities emanating from the body resulted into the creation of night, a creation that immensely pleased the demons.'

'Ford Brahma then attained a new physical form, which was pure (satvik) in nature. He created the deities from his mouth and once again abandoned his body resulting into the creation of day this time. All the deities became extremely pleased by this particular creation of Brahma. Once again Ford Brahma attained another form and created the 'pitras' and when he abandoned that body, 'sandhya' (evening) manifested from it.'

'Ford Brahma then attained a form that was 'Rajomaya' in nature and created human beings. His abandoning that particular form resulted into the creation of 'Pratahkal' (dawn). Subsequently, Ford Brahma created the different species like 'yaksha', 'sarpa', 'Gandharva' and 'Apsaras' and many more creatures from the different parts of his body. All the four Vedas namely Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samveda and Atharvaveda manifested themselves from each of Brahma's four mouths. Similarly, all the four castes such as Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra manifested from Brahma's mouth, arms, thighs and feet respectively.'

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THE BEGINNING OF COPULATIVE CREATION

'Having created Daksha Prajapati and his wife Prasuti from his right and left thumb respectively, Lord Brahma instructed both of them to make

their contribution in increasing the population with the help of copulative creation. In course of time, Daksha Prajapati begot numerous daughters all of whom were given in marriage to ten Manasputras.'

'Once, Daksha Prajapati had organized a grand Ashwamedha Yagya to which he had invited all his daughters and son-in-laws except Sati and Rudra. Sati eventually reached her father's place much against the advise of Shiva, who was strictly against going to a place uninvited. Shiva's apprehensions were not unfounded supposition, as Sati was indeed humiliated by Daksha in front of all the esteemed guests. Sati was so deeply hurt by her father's rude behaviour and the manner in which he made fun of her husband that she gave up her life by jumping into the sacrificial fire. When Rudra learnt about Sati's death he cursed Daksha by saying that he would loose his divine status and would be born as a human being in the lineage of Dhruva. In her next birth, Sati was bom as the daughter of Himalaya and Mainak. She was once again successful in getting Shiva as her husband by virtue of her deep devotion towards Shiva.'

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THE DHRUVA DYNASTY

Lord Vishnu, continuing with the tales of Garuda Purana told Shiva —'Uttanpad had two wives-Suruchi and Suniti. From his former wife he

begot a son named Uttam, while Suniti gave birth to Dhruva, who became immortal because of his unflinching devotion in me. Dhruva had a mighty son named 'Shlishta'. Prachinvarhi was Shlishta's son and Dhruva's grandson. Few other prominent personalities coming from the lineage of Dhruva were- Udardhi, Divanjaya, Ripu, Chakshush, Ruru, Anga, Ven etc. Ven was an atheist and was eventually killed by sages for his immoral deeds. Since Ven had no progeny, his death put a question mark on his successor. Sages tried to solve this problem by churning his thighs, which resulted into the emergence of Nishad. But, Nishad went to Vindhyachal to do penance. Seeing their whole effort go in vain, all the sages once again churned Ven's hands. This time Lord Vishnu himself incarnated as Prithu.'

'Prithu was an extremely kind hearted king and cared for his subjects. Once, when his kingdom was experiencing an acute famine, he successfully extracted the essential nutrients from the earth and thus saved his subjects from starvation. Prithu had ten sons prominent among whom were Antardhan, Havirdhan, Prachinvarhi and Prachetas. In course of time Prachetas married Marisha.'

'Just according to the curse of Shiva, Daksha Prajapati was reborn in the clan of Dhruva. His father's name was Prachetas and his mother was Marisha. In the beginning, Daksha Prajapati tried to do creation by merely expressing his will but his efforts went futile because of Shiva's curse. So, he had no option but to take the help of copulative creation and to meet his objective he married Asikni- the daughter of Viran.

In course of time he became the father of one thousand sons, all of whom perished while on their impossible mission of finding out the circumference of the earth. Actually sage Narada had incited all of them to undertake this impossible mission. Daksha though angry did not loose heart and in course of time he once again fathered one thousand sons. Once again, Narada was successful in convincing them to emulate the deeds of their elder brothers. All of them set out on an impossible mission never to return. Now, Daksha's anger crossed all limits and he cursed Narada by saying that he would take birth as a human for inciting his sons' to death. This is the reason why Narada was born as Kashyap's son.'

'In the years to follow, Daksha Prajapati begot sixty beautiful daughters

from Asikni among whom he gave away two daughters in marriage to sage Angira, two to sage Krishashva, ten to Dharma, fourteen to sage Kashyap and twenty-eight daughters to Chandrama. The names of Krishashva's wives were Supragya and Jaya while Dharma's wives were Arundhati, Vasu, Yami, Lamba, Bhanumati, Marutvati, Sankalpa, Muhurta, Sadhya and Vishva. The names of Kashyap's wives were Aditi, Diti, Danu, Kala, Anayu, Sinhika, Muni, Kadru, Sadhya, Ira, Krodha, Vinta, Surabhi and Khaga.'

Dharma's wives Vishva and Sadhya gave birth to the Vishvedevas and Sadhyaganas respectively. Similarly, Marutvati gave birth to Marutvans and Vasu to Vasuganas. Dharma's wife named Bhanu gave birth to twelve Bhanus while Muhurta gave birth to Muhurtaganas. Lamba gave birth to Ghosh while Yami gave birth to Nagvithi. Sankalpa gave birth to Sankalpa.

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Kashyap's wife Aditi gave birth to twelve Adityas while Diti gave birth to two sons (demons)-Hiranyakashipu and Hiranyaksha. Diti also had a daughter named Sinhika, who was married to Viprachiti. Hiranyakashipu had four sons- Anuhlad, Hlad, Prahlad and Sanhlad. Ayushman, Shibi

and Bashkal were the sons of Sanhlad. Prahlad had a mighty son named Virochan who himself had a son named Bali. Bali had one hundred sons in all and Ban was the eldest among them. Hiranyaksha had six sons all of whom were very brave and valiant. Their names were Utkur, Shakuni, Bhutsantapan, Mahanam, Mahabahu and Kalnam.

Danu had numerous sons who were all very brave-Dwimurdha, Shankar, Ayomukh, Shankushira, Kapil, Shambar, Ekachakra, Mahabahu, Tarak, Mahabal, Swarbhanu, Vrishaparva, Puloma, Mahasur and the mightiest among them-Viprachiti. Puloma and Kalka, both daughters of Vaishwanar were married to sage Kashyap. Kashyap had sixty thousand sons (demons) from both of them. Demons such as Nighat Kavach came from the lineage of Prahlad. Tamra had six daughters and their names were Shuki, Shyeni, Masi, Sugrivi, Shuchi and Gridhika. Shuki gave birth to numerous species of birds like Shuka (Parrot), Uluka (owls) and Kak(crows). Similarly Shyeni gave birth to Shyen (hawks) and Gridhika to Gridh (vultures). Shuchi was the mother of aquatic birds while Sugrivi gave birth to various animals like, horses, camels, donkeys, etc.' Arun and Garuda were born to Vinta while Sursa and Kadru gave birth to serpents. Krodha gave birth to powerful Pishachas, Surabhi to cows and buffaloes, Era to various vegetation like, creepers and grass, Khaga to Yakshas and Rakshas, Muni to Apsaras and Arishta gave birth to Gandharvas. Diti gave birth to fourty-nine Marutganas, all of whom are in fact the incarnations of Lord Vishnu.

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II. POWERFUL MANTRAS NAVGRAH MANTRA

Describing the significance of worshipping Navgraha (nine planets), Lord Vishnu told Rudra — 'One who worships the Navgraha with appropriate

rituals attains all the four 'purusharth' (objectives of man's life)- dharma (religion), artha (money), kama (sex), and moksha (salvation).' He then went on to give various mantras related with the Navgrahas, which a devotee should chant while worshipping them —

Surya (Sun) — Om Surya Murtaye Namah.

Om Hram Hrim Sah Suryay Namah.

Chandrama (Moon)— Om Somay Namah.

Bhaum (Mars)— Om Bhaumay Namah.

Buddh (Mercury)— Om Buddhay Namah.

Brihaspati (Jupiter)- Om Vrihaspataye Namah.

Shukra (Venus)— Om Shukray Namah.

Shani (Saturn)— Om Shanaishcharay Namah.

Rahu (Dragon's Head)— Om Rahave Namah.

Ketu (Dragon's Tail)— Om Ketave Namah.

II. POWERFUL MANTRAS

NAVGRAH MANTRA

Describing the significance of worshipping Navgraha (nine planets), Lord Vishnu told Rudra -- 'One who worships the Navgraha with appropriate rituals attains all the four 'purusharth' (objectives of man's life)- dharma (religion), artha (money), kama (sex), and moksha (salvation).' He then went on to give various mantras related with the Navgrahas, which a devotee should chant while worshipping them --

Surya (Sun) -- Om Surya Murtaye Namah.

Om Hram Hrim Sah Suryay Namah.

Chandrama (Moon)-- Om Somay Namah.
Bhaum (Mars)-- Om Bhaumay Namah.

Buddh (Mercury)-- Om Buddhay Namah.

Brihaspati (Jupiter)-- Om Vrihaspataye Namah.

Shukra (Venus)-- Om Shukray Namah.

Shani (Saturn)-- Om Shanaishcharay Namah.

Rahu (Dragon's Head)-- Om Rahave Namah.

Ketu (Dragon's Tail)-- Om Ketave Namah.

SHIVA MANTRA

There are various mantras used in the rituals of Shiva worship. A devotee should begin by worshipping the 'Asan' (the pedestal) on which the deity

is seated. There is a specific mantra for this particular ritual- Om Hram Shivay Namah. Subsequently, a salutation to lord Shiva is made by chanting - Om Shiva Murtaye Namah. A special ritual named 'Shadanganyas' is then performed by chanting different mantras associated with the specific parts of the deities' body such as -

Om Hram Hridayay Namah,

Om Hrim Shirse Swaha,

Om Hoorn Shikhayai Vashat,

Om Hraim Kavachay Hoorn,

Om Hraum Netra Trayay Vaushat,

Om Hrah Astray Phat.

Having accomplished the above mentioned rituals, a devotee should then worship each of the five faces of Shiva by chanting the following mantras -

Om Hram Saddyojatay Namah

Om Hrim Vamdevay Namah,

Om Hoorn Aghoray Namah,

Om Hraim Tatpurushay Namah,

Om Hraum Ishanay Namah.

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VISHNU MANTRA

While worshipping Lord Vishnu, first of all a devotee should worship the 'Asan' of the deity by chanting-

Om Vasudeva Asanay Namah.

He should then make salutations to Lord Vishnu by chanting the following mantras—

Om Vasudevay Murtaye Namah,

Om Aim Om Namo Bhagavate Vasudevay Namah,

Om Am Om Namo Bhagavate Sankarshanay Namah,

Om Aim Om Namo Bhagavate Pradyumnay Namah,

Om Ah Om Namo Bhagavate Aniruddhay Namah

Subsequently, a devotee should worship the various incarnations of Lord Vishnu, his weapons as well as his different mounts by incorporating the rituals of 'Shodashopachar' and by chanting the following mantras—

Om Narayanay Namah,

Om Tatsad Brahmane Namah,

Om Hoorn Vishnave Namah,

Om Hraum Namo Bhagavate Nrisinhay Namah,

Om Bhuh Om Namo Bhagavate Varahay Namah, etc.

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SARASWATI MANTRA

A devotee should begin his worship by making salutations to goddess Sarswati by chanting— Om Hrim Sarswatyai Namah.

He should then perform the rituals of 'Shadangnyas' by chanting the following mantras— Om Hram Hridayay Namah,

Om Hrim Shirse Swaha,

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LAKSHMI MANTRA

A devotee desirous of acquiring wealth and prosperity must worship Goddess Lakshmi with appropriate rituals. He should begin by making

salutations to the goddess by chanting the following mantra —

Om Srim Hrim Mahalakshmyai Namah.

Then follows the rituals of 'Shadangnyas' that is performed by chanting the specific mantras meant for them.

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III. ASTROLOGY IN GARUDA PURANA

THE CHARIOTS OF NAYGRAHAS

While describing the chariots of all the nine planets, Lord Vishnu told Rudra—' The chariot of Surya deva (Sun) has an unbelievable expanse stretching up to nine thousand yojans. The axle of the chariot is one crore and fifty seven lakh yojans long and wheels are fixed at both its ends. The wheels have six circumferences symbolizing the six main seasons and five spokes symbolizing the five different units of time measurement in them. The chariot of Surya (Sun) is pulled by seven horses. These horses symbolize the seven 'chhands' (stanzas used in poetry)-gayatri, vrihati, ushnik, jagati, trishtup, anushtup andpankti.

The chariot of chandrama (Moon) has three wheels in it. It is pulled by ten white horses. The color of Mangal's (Mars) chariot is golden and is pulled by horses of dark red color. Buddh's (Mercury) chariot is of brown color and is pulled by eight horses of the same color. The chariot of Brihaspati (Jupiter) is made of gold and is pulled by eight horses of yellowish complexion. Jupiter remains in each of the twelve zodiacs for a year.

Shukra's (Venus) chariot is well escorted by his army. The chariot has a mast on it's top and is pulled by horses that are found on earth.

Horses pulling the chariot of Shani(Satum) are of varicolored. The chariot of Rahu is pulled by eight horses, which are of the color of smoke. The chariot of Ketu is pulled by eight horses, which are red in color.

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DESCRIPTION OF YOGAS AND MUHURTAS

Giving elaborate description of inauspicious days on which one should not undertake travels or journeys, Lord Vishnu told Shiva—'Various

Yoginis (goddesses) dwell in different directions on specific days and one should never set out on journeys on those days. A yogini named Brahmani dwells in the East on Pratipada(first) and navami(ninth) of both the fortnights of each month and nobody should travel on both these dates towards east. Maheshwari dwells in the north on second and ninth of both the fortnights of each month and hence nobody should travel towards north on both these dates. Varahai dwells in the south on the fifth and thirteenth of both the fortnights of each month and hence it is unadvisable to travel towards south on the above mentioned dates. In the same manner, Indrani dwells in the west on sixth and fourteenth of both the fortnights of each month and therefore nobody should travel in this direction on both the above mentioned dates.'

While giving names of some auspicious Nakshatras suitable for undertaking journeys, Lord Vishnu said—'Constellations like Ashvini, Anuradha, Revati, Mrigashira, Mool, Punarvasu, Pushya, Hast and Jyeshtha are auspicious for undertaking journeys.'

Lord Vishnu, giving some specific combinations of days and tithis considered to be inauspicious said—'One should never travel on the following inauspicious days: Dwadashi falling on Sunday or Ekadashi falling on Monday or Navami falling on Wednesday or Ashtami falling on Thursday or Saptami falling on Lriday and Shashthi falling on Saturday.

Amrit Yoga — It is the most auspicious yoga for commencing any work. The conjunction of a particular day and specific nakshatra constitute this yoga. Lew examples of Amrit yoga are Mool nakshatra falling on Sunday, Shravan nakshatra on Monday, Uttara bhadrapad on Tuesday, Kritika on Wednesday, Punarvasu on Thursday, Purvafalguni on Lriday and Swati nakshatra falling on Saturday.

Visha Yoga — It is considered to be an inauspicious yoga and unsuitable for commencing any important work. Lew examples of this particular yoga are Bharni nakshatra falling on Lriday, Chitra nakshatra on Monday, Uttarashadha on Tuesday, Dhanishtha on Wednesday, Shatabhisha on Thursday, Rohini on Lriday, and Revati nakshatra falling on Saturday.

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GRAHA DASHA

Describing the period for which a particular planet is supposed to have its influence on the native, Lord Vishnu told Shiva— 'Surya's dasha

continues for six years and brings turbulence, turmoil and agony to the concerned person. Moon's dasha continues for fifteen years and is considered very auspicious as it brings happiness and prosperity. Mangal's dasha is considered inauspicious and lasts for eight years. It brings sorrow and misfortune. Buddh's dasha is auspicious and lasts for seventeen years. It brings all kinds of favorable results and is extremely rewarding in every respect. Shani's dasha lasts for ten years and brings all kinds of inauspicious results to a man. Brihaspati's dasha continues for nineteen years and is extremely auspicious. Rahu's dasha continues for twelve years and is inauspicious. Shukra's dasha lasts for twenty years and is auspicious.'

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PREDICTIONS BASED ON PHYSICAL TRAITS

Dwelling on length about the importance of physical traits and symptoms apparent in an individual, Lord Vishnu told Shiva-' If one sees the

following physical traits in a man, he should immediately understand that he is seeing a prospective King : Hands and feet as soft as a lotus flower, pink nails and no space left between the fingers when kept straight. There is no sign of bulging veins on his hands and palms and they do not sweat excessively. On the contrary, a person having rough feet that appears pale, with prominent veins on them indicates that the concerned person would be poor and miserable.'

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PREDICTING AGE WITH THE HELP OF FOREHEAD LINE

Lord Vishnu said—'Anybody having three parallel lines on his forehead lives happily for sixty years whereas two parallel lines indicates that he

would live till the age of forty years. Only one line on the forehead indicates that he would have a short life but if the line stretches up to both the ears then he lives for a century. If two parallel lines on the forehead stretches up to both the years then the concerned person lives for seventy years while a triple parallel lines reaching both the years indicates that he would live till the age of sixty years. A forehead devoid of any line on it means that the concerned person would live for only forty years while a cobweb of intersecting lines on the forehead indicates that the concerned person is definite to die a premature death. A forehead with a trident or an axe mark on it indicates that the concerned person would be prosperous and live for a century.

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PREDICTING AGE BY PALMISTRY

Lord Vishnu, continuing with his narration told Shiva that the age of a person could be predicted by the lines found on his palms— 'If the life

line reaches the base between index and middle fingers then the concerned person lives for a century. If the life line is long, clear and without intersections from other lines then the concerned person lives for a hundred years.

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PREDICTION BASED ON PHYSICAL TRAITS OF WOMEN

Lord Vishnu said—'A woman having a round face, curly hair and lower portion of her navel slightly slanted towards right, is extremely fortunate not only for herself but also for her whole clan. Similarly, a woman with golden complexion and hands as beautiful and soft as red lotus flower is exceptionally chaste and faithful towards her husband. A woman having dry and unruly hair and also round eyes becomes a widow.

A woman whose face is round like a full moon and which radiates like a rising sun and whose lips are juicy like a 'Bael' fruit (Wood apple), enjoys a happy and contented life. A woman having a cobweb of lines on her palms is sure to lead a torturous and painful life whereas a palm with few lines indicates that she would be poor. If the lines are pink, then they indicate happiness, prosperity and good health whereas blackish lines indicate that she would live a life of slavery. Any woman having either a 'Chakra', a hook or a ear ring mark on her hand indicates that she would beget worthy sons and rule like a queen. A woman having hair around her breasts as well as a protruding lower lip spells doom for her husband. Any woman having a festoon mark on her palms indicates that she would get married in a family superior to her in status.

A woman having a round navel with brown hair around it leads a life of slavery despite being bom in a royal family. A woman whose little toes as well as big toes of both the legs do not touch the ground while walking spells doom for her husband. In the same manner beautiful eyes indicate good fortune while soft and tender skin indicate a happy married life.

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VARIOUS NAMES OF 'SHALIGRAM'

Describing how a Shaligram is named on the basis of number of Chakra present on it, Lord Vishnu said—'If there is only one Chakra on the

Shaligram idol then it is called 'Sudarshan'. In the same way, Shaligram with two Chakras is known as 'Lakshmi Narayan' while that having three Chakras on it is called 'Achyut'. Shaligram with four Chakra on it is known as 'Chaturbhuj', that with five Chakras 'Vasudev'. Similarly, Shaligram with six, seven, eight, ninth, tenth, eleven and twelve Chakras are called 'Pradyumana', 'Sankarshan', 'Purushottam', 'Navavyuha', Dashatmak', 'Aniruddha' and Dwi-Dashatmak respectively. Shaligrams with more than twelve Chakras are called infinite.

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HOW JEWELS ORIGINATED

Sutji, once narrated the following tale to the assembled sages which sheds light on the origin of jewels and other precious stones—'During ancient

times there lived a mighty demon named Bala. Although he had defeated the deities and driven them out from the heaven, yet he had assured them that he would extend fullest cooperation and support in any yagya performed by deities in future. All the deities planned to perform a 'Yagya' in order to regain their lost kingdom. They made all the necessary preparations for the Yagya but were unable to find a person who could offer himself as a 'sacrificial being'- a ritual without which any yagya is incomplete.'

'Seeing no other option, the worried deities took refuge of 'Balasur' and requested him to offer himself for sacrifice so that the yagya could be accomplished without any hitch. Balasur was bound by his promise so he agreed. This way, the deities were able to accomplish their yagya. But, a strange event coincided with the death of Balasur, which surprised even the deities. The virtuous deed of offering himself as a sacrificial being in the yagya ceremony had amazingly transformed Balasur's corpse into jewels. Deities tried to carry the 'Jewel-body' through the aerial route towards a safer place, but it was fragmented into countless pieces due to the impact of ferocious speed of the wind it had to negotiate. These pieces scattered all over the places- ocean, rivers, Mountains, Forests, etc. In course of time these places got transformed into countless mines of jewels and precious stones such as Vajra (diamond), Muktamani, Indraneel, Sphatik, Prawal, Pushparag and many more.

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IV. PROMINENT PLACES OF PILGRIMAGE

Sutji, while giving the names of some prominent places of pilgrimage told the assembled sages— The banks of Ganga are considered to be the

holiest among all the places of pilgrimage. The holy Ganga, which originates from the Himalayas in the north, ultimately gets merged with the ocean in the east. During her entire course of flow, she passes through numerous holy places, which owe their holiness mainly to her. Although, any place situated on the banks of Ganga is considered holy, yet Prayag, Haridwar, Varanasi and Ganga sangam (The place where she meets the ocean) have special significance and there is no other place as holy as each of them. Prayag is believed to fulfil both the wishes, which a man aspires for- worldly enjoyments as well as salvation.

Performing the rituals of pinda dan here not only helps the ancestors to liberate but also himself. Varanasi is the same place where Lord Shiva and Keshav have their respective abodes. Donating at Kurukshetra brings incomparable virtues and gives both worldly enjoyments as well as salvation. Kedar teerth is capable of liberating even a heinous sinner from all his sins. Few other places considered very holy are- Shwetdweepa, Naimisharanya, Pushkar, Ayodhya, Chitrakut, Gomti, Kanchipuri, Sri Shail, Kam- teerth, Amarkantak, Ujjain, Mathura, Govardhan, etc. All these places have great religious significance and each of them is capable of liberating a man from all his sins.

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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF GAYA TEERTH

Once, while narrating how Gaya, a prominent place of pilgrimage in eastern part of India got its name, Lord Brahma told sage Vyasa—'During

ancient times there lived a mighty demon named Gaya. He used to torment the deities, who ultimately went to seek the help of Lord Vishnu. Lord Vishnu successfully killed Gayasur after a fierce mace-duel. The place where Gaya died became famous by his name. There is a grand Vishnu temple situated at Gaya where there is a magnificent idol of Lord 'Gadhadhar' (Lord Vishnu holding a mace in his hand).

Gaya is considered to be the most ideal place of pilgrimage for performing the shraddh rituals. It is believed that a person goes to hell if he dies in the following circumstances- if he dies without his consecrations being performed, or if a wild animal kills him, or if he meets an accidental death no matter what the reasons are. But, if 'Shraddh rituals' are performed at 'Gaya' then the soul of such a man gets rid of the tortures of the hell and goes to heaven.

The importance of performing 'Shraddh rituals' over there can be gauged by the fact that a person becomes liberated from 'pitra rina' (debts towards one's father) once he touches the sacrosanct soil of 'Gaya'. The reason being that Lord Vishnu himself dwells there in the form of 'Pitra devata' and by having his divine glimpse a man is freed of all his three debts. The entire area stretching from the foothills of Vishnu mountain to 'Uttar Manas' is considered extremely holy and this is the same area where river Falgu flows. Offering 'Pinda dan' to ancestors at this place helps them to attain salvation. While performing the rituals of 'Pinda dan' he should chant the following mantra—

'Esha Pindo Maya Dastratav Haste Janardanah;

Parlokam Gate Moksham Kshaymu Patishthatam.'

There are many other places as holy as the banks of Falgu and performance of 'Shraddh rituals' over there give undiminished virtues to the ancestors - Dharma-Prishtha, Brahmasar, Gayashirsha, Akshay-Teerth, Dhenukaranya are few such places capable of liberating twenty generations of a man. The entire city of 'Gaya' is considered sacrosanct and performing the rituals of 'Shraddh' or offering Pinda dan to ancestors at any place within 'Gaya' helps the soul of the ancestors to attain to Brahmaloka.

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THE RITUALS OF PINDADAN

Before setting out for Gaya to offer Pinda dan, a man should appropriately perform 'Shraddh rituals' in the village or town he lives.

Each step taken towards Gaya acts as a stepping stone to the heaven for the ancestors. Getting one's head tonsured or observing fast is prohibited in some places of pilgrimage like Badrinath, Kurukshetra, Jagannathpuri and Gaya. There is no time restriction on the performance of Shraddh rituals at Gaya and they can be performed anytime.

After reaching Gaya, a man should first of all invoke his ancestors while taking bath in the holy Falgu and offer pinda dan to them. He should then visit the temple of Lord Gadadhar (Vishnu) and worship the deity. The next day, he should once again perform the Shraddh rituals at Dharmaranya and Matangwapi, two sacrosanct places having great religious significance. On the third day, he should perform the rituals of 'Tarpan' on the banks of 'Brahmasada teerth' and then go to 'Koop-teerth' and 'Yoop-teerth' to repeat the performance of Shraddh rituals.

He should then feed the Brahmins at 'Goprachar teerth', an act considered to help ancestors attain salvation. On the fourth day he should take a holy dip in river Falgu and once again perform 'Shraddh rituals' at a place called 'Gayashirsh'. There are many more holy places in the vicinity where he is required to perform Shraddh rituals'- Vyasa, Dehimukh, Panchagni, Surya- teerth, Som-teerth and Kartikeya-teerth are few of them. Finally, on the fifth day, he should take a holy dip in 'Gada-lolak' teerth and offer 'Pinda-dan' under the Banyan tree called 'Akshay vat'- an act believed to liberate all his predecessors as well as coming generations from the bondage of Earth. After that Brahmins are fed. Feeding one Brahmin at Gaya brings the same virtues what one would get by feeding one crore Brahmins elsewhere.'

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TALE OF KING VISHAL-

Lord Brahma then narrated a tale glorifying the significance of performing 'Shraddh rituals' at Gaya— 'O Vyasa! Once upon a time there

lived a trader who was sonless. One day, while he was on his pilgrimage, he met a restless ghost, who requested him to perform the rituals of Pinda dan at Gaya so that not only he became liberated from the pains and tortures of being a spirit but also he (trader) went to heaven. The trader went to Gaya accompanied by his younger brother, as per the request of the Ghost and not only performed the rituals of 'Pinda-dan' for the ghost but also for his own ancestors.

As a result not only the ghost but all his ancestors became liberated. On account of his virtuous deeds, the trader was blessed with a son. He enjoyed a long life full of joy and contentment. After his death he was reborn as Vishal, in the princely state of Vishala. After growing up he got married but even after a long time he did not beget a son and this made him very sad. One day he asked the royal priests about the reason he did not beget a son. All the priests advised him to offer Pinda dan at Gaya as they felt that by doing so the king would definitely get blessed with a son and they were not wrong, as Vishal indeed was blessed with a son after he had offered Pinda dan at Gaya.'

One day while Vishal was having a walk in the royal garden he was amazed to see three entities descending down from the sky. After all three of them had landed on the ground, Vishal had a close look at them. One of them was fair while the second one's complexion was reddish. The third and the most ferocious among them was of dark complexion. For a moment Vishal was dumbstruck by this mysterious sight but it did not take him long to gather his composure. He asked them as to who they were and was stunned by the answers he got.

Actually, these three entities were none other than the souls of his Father, Grand Father and Great Grand Father, all of whom had died long ago. They had come to thank Vishal, who by performing the rituals of Shraddh had helped them in getting liberated from all their sins. The entity appearing fair, who in fact was Vishal's father said— 'Thank you for helping me attain to Indra loka. If it were not for you, I would have still been languishing in hell. The entity with reddish complexion is your Grand Father, who had committed grave sins while he was alive and as the consequences he went to the most ferocious hell named Avichi after his death. Even he has been liberated because of you. The third entity among us and having dark complexion is your Great Grand Father. He

had committed heinous of sins while he was alive but even he has become liberated because of you. We have come to express our gratitude and to thank you for having liberated us from our miserable conditions. All three of us are now departing for heaven.'

Having said this all three of them disappeared in a moment. Vishal was extremely satisfied that he had been successful in fulfilling one of the major obligations towards his ancestors (pitra-rina) by helping them attain to heaven. He enjoyed a long life and after his death he too went to heaven.

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PRAJAPATI RUCHI'S DISENCHANTMENT

Once, Sutji recounted the following tale to the assembled sages, which had been originally told by sage Markandeya to Kraunchki long ago-

'Once, Sage Ruchi became so disenchanted with the world that he decided to remain a bachelor, a decision which made his 'Pitras'(ancestors) extremely worried. They tried to change his mind by citing numerous benefits of householder's life and the yeomen service he does to the society.

They said— 'O Ruchi! The decision you have taken is most unfortunate. Perhaps you are not aware of the importance a 'Grihasta' holds in the society. But for his cooperation, not a single religious activity can take place. It's your misconception that a 'Grihasta' can not attain salvation. On the contrary, he has numerous opportunities in his life to attain salvation. Different rituals and consecrations enable him to achieve this important goal of a man's life.' Pitras' advises had great impact on Prajapati Ruchi and he agreed to get married.'

Thereafter a search for an ideal match began but even after best of his efforts he did not get any. Prajapati Ruchi then decided to please Lord Brahma by his austere penance. He commenced his penance, which continued for a very long period. Finally, Lord Brahma appeared and advised him to please his 'Pitras'. Acting on the advice of Lord Brahma, Prajapati Ruchi eulogized his ancestors and performed the rituals of 'Tarpan' to pacify their souls. All his 'Pitras' appeared and blessed him.

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PRAJAPATI RUCHI MARRIES MANINI

The blessings given by 'Pitras' fructified instantaneously as a beautiful 'Apsara' manifested herself from the river flowing nearby and said—'O

great sage! I am Pramlocha. I would consider it as my good fortune if you give your consent to marry my daughter- Manini. Pushkar- son of Varun is her father. In course of time a son named 'Rauchya' will be born to you.'

This was the day Prajapati Ruchi was eagerly waiting for. He decided to get married then and there so he invited all the prominent sages and the marriage ceremony was solemnized in their presence. In course of time, a son named 'Rauchya' was born to them. He was a great sage after whom a Manvantar was named.

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V. DESCRIPTION OF VARIOUS CONSECRATIONS

While describing the significance of various consecrations, Lord Vishnu told Shiva that the union of man's sperm and woman's ovum results into

the birth of a child. This union along with the whole process of foetus getting transformed into a baby is a lengthy affair during which it imbibes numerous impurities. Consecrations purify a man from all these impurities. Lord Vishnu said —'The mankind has been categorized into four prominent castes- Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra. The former three castes are also known as 'Dwijas' (Twice bom. The solemnization of a consecration named Yagyopavit is believed to be their second birth.) because only they are entitled to get consecrated into this particular ceremony. Right from his birth till he takes his last breath, a 'Dwija' has to undergo various consecrations.'

Giving the names of some prominent consecration ceremonies that a Dwija has to go through, Lord Vishnu said—'Garbhadhan Sanskar is performed at the time of conception. The scriptures have clearly stated about the best time for a woman to conceive- twelve days after her menstruation has started, beginning from the fifth day as the first four days are not considered auspicious for this purpose. 'Punsavan sanskar' is performed in the third month after conception while 'Seemantonayan sanskar' is performed in the sixth or eighth month after conception. After the birth of a child the consecration named 'Jat karma' is performed while 'Nam karan sanskar' is performed on the eleventh day after his birth whereby the new bom baby is given a name. 'Nishkraman sanskar' is performed in the fourth month and 'Annaprashan sanskar' in the sixth month. The consecration named 'Chudamani sanskar' can be performed either in the first, third or fifth year of the child.'

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UPANAYAN SANSKAR

Dwelling on length about the appropriate way of performing 'Upanayan sanskar' (Sacred thread ceremony) rituals, Lord Vishnu said—'A Brahmin

child should get consecrated with the sacred thread in his eighth year while a Kshatriya child's consecration should be performed when he has attained the age of eleven. 'Upanayan sanskar' of a Vaishya child should be performed in his twelfth year.'

A dwija, whose 'Upanayan sanskar' has been performed, must face southwards while relieving himself in the night whereas during daytime he should face northward. Subsequently, he should purify himself by properly washing his urinary organ with mud (soap) and water. He should also wash his hands and feet. The purification is believed to be incomplete until and unless the rituals of 'Achman' (ritualistic rinsing of the mouth) have been performed. Next morning, after having a bath, he should do 'Pranayama' and chant the sacred Gayatri mantra facing east. In the evening he should chant Gayatri mantra facing south. After this the ritual of 'Bhikshatan' is performed whereby he seeks alms and donates everything that he gets to his Guru as a mark of respect to him.

This particular ritual is symbolic and emphasizes the absolute necessity of subduing one's ego before acquiring knowledge from his Guru. A celibate is supposed to wear nothing but a Deer skin and a waist band made of long reeds on his person with a sacred thread hanging across his shoulder and carry a stick in his hand. The celibate whose Upanayan sanskar has been performed should stay at his Guru's hermitage till he completes his education. It is also his duty to collect food grains from the neighbourhood to meet the food requirement of all the people living in the hermitage. A Brahmin celibate should chant 'Bhavati bhiksham dehi' while seeking alms whereas a Kshatriya celibate should chant the same mantra with a slight modification ' Bhiksham bhavati dehi'. Similarly, a Vaishya celibate should chant 'Bhiksham dehi bhavati' while seeking alms.'

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After finishing his education the celibate should shave his beards and moustaches for the first time. Strict guidelines have been laid down for

each caste with respect to this particular consecration. A Brahmin should get consecrated with this ritual in his sixteenth year while a Kshatriya should get it performed in his twenty-second year. Similarly, a Vaishya should get consecrated with this ritual in his twenty-fourth year. The above mentioned age limits are also the maximum before which respective castes are supposed to get consecrated with the sacred thread ceremony failing which he becomes a religious outcaste.

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GRIHASTA ASHRAM

His education being complete now it is the time for him to enter the life of a householder. But, before leaving the hermitage he should pay

'Dakshina' as a mark of gratitude to his Guru for all the knowledge he has imparted to him. With the permission of his Guru, he should then marry a girl who is beautiful, younger to him and belonging to different 'Gotra'. Although the best option for him is to marry a woman belonging to his own caste, but he is allowed to marry outside his caste, provided the woman hails from a caste inferior to him but under no circumstances he should marry a woman belonging to superior caste.

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COPULATION PROHIBITED ON CERTAIN DAYS

An ideal wife is one who obeys the commands of her husband without any inhibition. According to the scriptures the best time for a married couple

to copulate is after the woman has had her menstruation, especially till sixteen days after her periods have commenced are considered best for this purpose. But, there are also certain days on which making sexual contacts is prohibited-the first four days after her periods have started, Ashtami, Chaturdashi, Amavasya and Pumima are few such days. If the above given rules are followed then a couple can beget worthy sons possessing good qualities. Considering the fact that a woman has sexual urge eight times more than a man, scriptures have also advised a man not to overlook the sexual urge of his wife and to satisfy her without bothering about the prohibited days.

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PURIFICATION OF DIFFERENT ARTICLES

Describing the methods of purifying different articles, Lord Vishnu reflected on the instructions which sage Yagyavalkya had once given to

other sages in this regard-'Substances like gold, silver, conch, vegetables, rope, leather articles, etc. become pure once they are washed with water. In the same way, utensils made of wood or animal's horn become pure after they have been chiseled. Utensils used in yagya become pure after they have been rubbed with mud and then washed with water. Washing woolen and silken clothes with tepid water or cow-urine make them pure.

Land is purified if it is coated with cow-dung. Copper vessels, articles made of lead and Tin vessels become pure if cleaned with a solution of alkali, acid and then washed with water. Iron and bronze vessels become pure if cleaned with ash and water. The followings are believed to be pure- sun-light, fire, cow, horse, earth, air, dew-drops, food-grains up for sale in the market, etc. A man should perform Achaman in the following circumstances- after his bath, after drinking water, after sneezing, after waking up from sleep, after having food, after having a walk on dusty path, after changing clothes, etc.

PURIFICATION OF DIFFERENT ARTICLES

Describing the methods of purifying different articles, Lord Vishnu reflected on the instructions which sage Yagyavalkya had once given to other sages in this regard-'Substances like gold, silver, conch, vegetables, rope, leather articles, etc. become pure once they are washed with water. In the same way, utensils made of wood or animal's horn become pure after they have been chiseled. Utensils used in yagya become pure after they have been rubbed with mud and then washed with water. Washing woolen and silken clothes with tepid water or cow-urine make them pure.

Land is purified if it is coated with cow-dung. Copper vessels, articles made of lead and Tin vessels become pure if cleaned with a solution of alkali, acid and then washed with water. Iron and bronze vessels become pure if cleaned with ash and water. The followings are believed to be pure- sun-light, fire, cow, horse, earth, air, dew-drops, food-grains up for sale in the market, etc. A man should perform Achaman in the following circumstances- after his bath, after drinking water, after sneezing, after waking up from sleep, after having food, after having a walk on dusty path, after changing clothes, etc.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF SHRADDH RITUALS

Describing the proper way of performing Shraddh rituals, sage Yagyavalkya told the assembled sages—'A performer of Shraddh rituals

should invite able Brahmins and offer them seats of Kusha grass. First of all an invocation is made to 'Vishvedeva' by chanting a mantra in his praise, an action which is followed by scattering grains of barley in the vessels kept in front of the Deity's idol. Subsequently, some water and a small quantity of barley is taken in a small vessel, which is then handed over to the Brahmins along with other articles such as ghee lamp, garland, incense, etc. There are specific mantras for this particular ritual. After that he should offer seats of Kusha grass to all his ancestors one by one beginning from the left hand side and subsequently moving on to the right hand side. All the ancestors are then invoked with specific mantras.

The scriptures allow the use of sesame seeds in place of barley if latter is unavailable due to some reason. These sesame seeds should be kept in a 'Ardhya patra' and placed to the left side of each 'Pitras' (ancestors) in an inverted position. While performing 'havan' he should make offerings of 'ghee' and other articles in the 'havan kunda'. Finally, Brahmins are fed after which the performer of Shraddh rituals offers Pindadan in the name of his ancestors. After that he helps all the Brahmins perform 'Achaman' and gives donations to them. The idol of Vishvedeva is immersed in a nearby river or pond and the inverted pots are kept back in the normal position. Finally, all the Brahmins are seen off with respect. Shraddh rituals performed in the above mentioned way immensely satisfy the ancestors and help them attain to heaven.

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VI. 'KARMA' AND ITS CONSEQUENCE- KARMA VIPAK

Continuing with his discourses, sage Yagvalkya told the assembled sages that an enlightened soul is aware of the fact that the mortal world being

impermanent in nature has its beginning as well as its end. He is also aware that a man reaps the fruits of his evil deeds in the form of 'Adhidaivik' (heavenly wrath), 'Adhyatmik' (obstacles in spiritual development) and 'Adhibhautik' (worldly problems like diseases, poverty, etc.) That is why he endeavours to follow the path of virtuosity so that he can attain salvation, the ultimate objective of man's life.

Anybody engaged in sinful deeds is definite to go to hell whereas virtuous deeds help a man to attain to heaven. After tasting the fruits of his actions he once again has to take birth to realize the unfulfilled wishes of his previous birth. This cycle of transmigration is an endless process, leading to countless births and deaths of a man. He experiences unbearable pains in his mother's wombs lying in an inverted position for nine months.

Once again he has to go through the same dreadful experiences of youth, old age, diseases and death. A sinner, after tasting the fruits of his actions in the heaven or hell, depending on his virtuous or sinful deeds takes rebirth on the basis of the gravity of sins committed. Killing a Brahmin is believed to be the most heinous of sin and the person who has committed such a sin after having suffered the tortures of hell takes rebirth as a donkey or a dog.

In the same way a person who has stolen gold takes rebirth as lowly creatures such as worms or insects. A drunkard takes rebirth as a frog and a person developing illicit relationship with his teacher's wife takes rebirth as grass or hay. One who shows disrespect to his parents is reborn as a tortoise whereas anybody who wishes ill of his friends is reborn as a donkey.

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ATONING FOR SINS

While describing various means by which a sinner can atone for his sins, sage Yagyavalkya said-' A man is certain to meet downfall and

degradation in the following three conditions- if he goes against the instructions given in the scriptures, indulges in prohibited activities and runs after sensual pleasures. Atoning for one's sin is the best means of getting liberated from his sin as well as guilt. A sinner who does not atone for his sin goes through unbearable tortures and pains in hells more horrible than in 'Maharaurav' (name of a hell).

Very severe punishment has been recommended for a person, who has breached the modesty of a woman especially if she happens to be his friend's wife, teacher's wife, his own daughter or sister-in-law, etc. Scriptures are of the opinion that such a sinner should be killed without showing any mercy. If the woman is a willing partner in this ghastly crime then even she should be meted out the same punishment.

A person who has killed a Brahmin should atone for his sin by seeking alms for twelve years carrying a skull as his begging bowl. He should sustain himself on whatever he receives as alms. Protecting a cow's life also helps a man from getting liberated from the sin of 'Brahma-hatya'. A drunkard should atone for his sin by consuming any of the following- boiling liquor, ghee, cow-milk or cow-urine. A person accused of stealing gold can become liberated from his sin by donating gold equivalent to his own weight. A person who has killed a cow can become liberated from his sin by consuming 'Panchgavya' (a mixture of cow-milk, cow-dung, cow-urine, ghee and curd) and leading the rest of his life in the servitude of cows.

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VII. DIFFERENT KIND OF AUSTERITIES

Describing the various types of austerities, Lord Vishnu named a few of them—

Yama (Restraining Passion)- This particular austerity comprises of ten virtues- Celibacy, Forgiveness, Meditation, Truthfulness, Honesty, Non-violence, Not stealing, Gentleness and Self control.

Niyama (Daily Routine)- This austerity stresses the importance of purity: both of the body as well as of the mind. It comprises of the following activities: bathing daily, contemplation, observing fast, performing oblations, self study, abstinence, penance, avoiding anger, being respectful towards teacher and purity.

Mahasantapan Vrata- This particular austerity comprises of specific rituals related with the usage of 'Panchagavya' (a mixture of cow milk, curd, ghee, cow urine and cow dung). On the first day of the austerity a devotee should have only milk, on the second day curd, on the third day 'ghee', on the fourth day 'gomutra' (cow urine), on the fifth day 'gomaya' (cow dung), on the sixth day he should live only on 'kushodak' (drinking water from a vessel in which 'kusha' grass have been kept) and on the last day of the austerity he should observe complete fast.

Pama Krichchha Vrata- Separate solutions of 'Palash' (Butea frondosa), 'Gular' (Ficus glomerata), 'Kamal' (lotus) and 'Bael' tree (wood apple) are prepared after boiling the leaves of respective vegetation mentioned above. On the first day of the austerity a devotee should have only 'Palash' solution while on the second day he should have 'Gular' solution. On the third day he should have 'Kamal' solution while on the fourth day he should live only on 'Bael' solution. On the fifth day of the austerity he should live only on 'Kusha' grass solution and nothing else. This is the manner in which the austerity of 'Parnakrichchha vrata' is observed.

Tapta Krichchha Vrata- A person observing this austerity should begin by having hot milk on the first day followed by tepid ghee and lukewarm water on the second and third day respectively. He should observe a complete fast on the fourth day.

Pad Krichchha Vrata - This particular austerity lasts for four days. On the first day a devotee should observe 'Ekabhakta vrata' (having food only once a day in the noon). On the second day he should observe 'Nakta' vrata (having food only once a day in the night). On the third day he should break his fast by having whatever is available with him because

anything that has been provided by others is strictly prohibited. He should observe a total fast on the fourth day. When a devotee observes these cycles of austerity for three times then it is called 'Prajapatya krichchhra vrata'.

Ati Krichchha Vrata - Rituals of this austerity is more or less similar to that of Prajapatya krichchhra vrata with a slight difference- here fast is broken with a handful of cooked food. When this particular ritual is observed for four days then it is called Atikrichchha vrata.

Krichchha Atikrichha Vrata - Observing the rituals of Ati kr ichchha vrata for twenty-one days living only on milk and water is called Krichchhakrichha vrata.

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Krichchha Atikrichha Vrata - Observing the rituals of Atikrichchha vrata for twenty-one days living only on milk and water is called Krichchhakrichha vrata.

Parak Vrata- Observing complete fast for twelve continuous days is called Parak vrata.

Chandrayan Vrata - It's an important austerity lasting for a month which

commences on First day of the bright half of a month by observing fast for the whole day and breaking it in the night with one morsel of food. On the next day, i.e. 'dwitiya' one morsel of food is increased which means that instead of one morsel of food now two morsels are taken. This way one morsel of food is increased on each of the following days till the fourteenth day (chaturdashi) when the fast is broken by having fourteen morsels of food. A total fast is observed on 'Amavasya' (dark moon). On the next day i.e. first day of the dark half of the month one morsel is decreased which means that the devotee should break his fast with thirteen morsels of food. This way one morsel is decreased on each successive day till 'chaturdashi' when a devotee breaks his fast by having only one morsel of food. This is the way, how a Chandrayan vrata should be observed.

Anang Trayodashi Vrata - This austerity is related with the worship of Lord Shiva and commences on the thirteenth day of the bright half of the Hindu month Margashirsh and lasts for a year. It concludes exactly after a year when 'Rati' and 'Anang' are worshipped with appropriate rituals. Ten thousand offerings are made in the sacrificial fire. Brahmins are fed and donations made to them. One who observes this austerity is blessed with health, wealth and good fortune.

Akhand Dwadashi Vrata - This austerity is related with the worship of Lord Vishnu. It commences on the twelfth day of the bright half of the Hindu month Margashirsh and lasts for a year consisting of three phases. One important characteristic of this austerity is that after four months, which is the first phase of the austerity, five vessels filled with food-grains are donated to Brahmins. In the second phase of the austerity consisting of four months and commencing from the Hindu month Chaitra, pots filled with parched grams are donated to Brahmins. Similarly, in the third and final phase of the austerity pots filled with ghee are donated to Brahmins.

Shiva Ratri Vrata- This austerity is related with the worship of Lord Shiva and a fast is observed on the fourteenth day of the dark half of the Hindu month Falgun. A devotee should observe fast in the night and worship Lord Shiva by chanting 'Om Namah Shivay'. He should perform 'havan' with black sesame seeds and worship Lord Shiva at midnight, in the third and the fourth 'prahar' (one prahar equals three hour) with appropriate

rituals. One who observes fast on this day gets all his wishes fulfilled and attains salvation as well. A devotee who observes Shiva Ratri fast for twelve successive years acquires knowledge, wealth, success and happiness. Such a man also attains to Shiva loka after his death.

Parak Vrata- Observing complete fast for twelve continuous days is called Parak vrata.

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VIRTUES OF OBSERVING FAST ON SHIVA RATRI NIGHT

During ancient times there lived a hunter named Sundarsen in the province of Arbuda. One day, he went deep into the forest in search of his prey but unfortunately he found none. He wandered all over the place but in vain. When evening came, he climbed up a wood apple (Bael) tree to protect himself from the wild animals. Sundarsen was worried that his family would have nothing to eat that night. Engrossed in his contemplative mood, he kept on plucking leaves from the 'Bael' tree and throwing them down. There was a Shivalinga just under the tree and the leaves, which Sundarsen threw, fell down on it.

Next morning while Sundarsen was climbing down the tree, his arrow fell down. While picking up his arrow, he touched the Shivalinga. Sundarsen was unaware of the fact that it was Shivaratri night and he had worshiped Lord Shiva with appropriate rituals albeit inadvertently-he had offered Bilva patra to Lord Shiva and had touched the Shivalinga. He attained to Shiva loka on account of the virtues attained by his inadvertent worship of Lord Shiva.

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THE POWER OF CHASTITY

Once, sage Vyasa went to Brahmaloka to get his doubts cleared on certain spiritual matters from Lord Brahma. While dwelling on a wide range of

religious topics such as importance of austerities and various incarnations Lord Vishnu took to protect righteousness, Lord Brahma narrated a tale of a Brahmin woman who possessed divine powers on account of her chastity.

Lord Brahma said—'During ancient times there lived a Brahmin named Kaushik in Pratishthanpur Nagar. He was inflicted with leprosy but still his wife was very chaste and faithful towards him. His wife used to be on her toes attending to all his demands and looking after all his requirements. But still, he used to scold and abuse his wife at the first given opportunity without any rhyme or reason. However, his wife did not mind his behaviour understanding quite well the frustrations of a man suffering from dreaded disease like leprosy.'

One day, something happened which made Kaushik extremely angry and in a fit of rage he made an impossible demand thinking that his wife would never comply by it giving him an opportunity to curse her to the satisfaction of his heart. Shouting angrily at his wife, Kaushik said- Age has started showing effect on you. You don't look beautiful as before. You have also started neglecting me. Take me to a beautiful prostitute so that I can satisfy my sexual urge.

Kaushik's wife was deeply hurt by his rude and unfair remarks but she remained cool and calm. Being a chaste and faithful wife she had no option but to obey her husband's command. So, she left for a prostitute's house carrying Kaushik on her shoulders.

The prostitute's house was far and it became dark while they were still on the way. Because of darkness, Kaushik's wife could not see sage Mandavya, who in spite of his innocence was given a severe punishment by the king- he had been made to sit on a pointed cone which after having penetrated through his body had pierced even his skull. But, being a great sage, Mandavya was engrossed in his meditation even in such a painful physical condition. Unfortunately, Kaushik's feet, which were hanging down the shoulders of his wife, touched Mandavya's body. Mandavya's meditation was disturbed and he came out from his meditative level. As a result he became conscious of his unbearable physical pain and cursed that whoever had disturbed his meditation would not live to see the next day.'

Kaushik died the next day but his wife, who had full confidence in her power of chastity, knew that her husband would be alive once again. She cursed angrily — 'Mandavya has a misconception about his power. He thinks that only he can control the natural phenomena but perhaps he does not know what feats a chaste woman is capable of performing. Its my command to the Sun not to rise from tomorrow onwards.'

And indeed, the Sun stopped rising from the next morning leading to catastrophic fallout. Everything went haywire in the world, which made the deities extremely worried. They came to me (Lord Brahma) with a request to reveal why Sun had stopped rising. I told them that it was all due to the curse of a chaste woman and then I narrated the whole story. I revealed to them that nobody except Sati Anusuya was capable of bringing back order in the world. I advised them to seek the help of Sati Anusuya who was famous for her exceptional chastity. So, all the deities went to Sati Anusuya and requested her to make the Sun rise so that everything became orderly in the world once again. Sati Anusuya agreed to lend her help in bringing back normalcy in the world. She, by the virtue of her chastity not only made the Sun rise daily but also made dead Kaushik alive once again. Such is the power commanded by a woman practicing the austerity of chastity. There are numerous examples of such women famous for their chastity and Sita was one of them.

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The prostitute's house was far and it became dark while they were still on the way. Because of darkness, Kaushik's wife could not see sage Mandavya, who in spite of his innocence was given a severe punishment by the king- he had been made to sit on a pointed cone which after having penetrated through his body had pierced even his skull. But, being a great sage, Mandavya was engrossed in his meditation even in such a painful physical condition. Unfortunately, Kaushik's feet, which were hanging down the shoulders of his wife, touched Mandavya's body. Mandavya's meditation was disturbed and he came out from his meditative level. As a result he became conscious of his unbearable physical pain and cursed that whoever had disturbed his meditation would not live to see the next day.'

Kaushik died the next day but his wife, who had full confidence in her power of chastity, knew that her husband would be alive once again. She cursed angrily -- 'Mandavya has a misconception about his power. He thinks that only he can control the natural phenomena but perhaps he does not know what feats a chaste woman is capable of performing. Its my command to the Sun not to rise from tomorrow onwards.'

And indeed, the Sun stopped rising from the next morning leading to catastrophic fallout. Everything went haywire in the world, which made the deities extremely worried. They came to me (Lord Brahma) with a request to reveal why Sun had stopped rising. I told them that it was all due to the curse of a chaste woman and then I narrated the whole story. I revealed to them that nobody except Sati Anusuya was capable of bringing back order in the world. I advised them to seek the help of Sati Anusuya who was famous for her exceptional chastity. So, all the deities went to Sati Anusuya and requested her to make the Sun rise so that everything became orderly in the world once again. Sati Anusuya agreed to lend her help in bringing back normalcy in the world. She, by the virtue of her chastity not only made the Sun rise daily but also made dead Kaushik alive once again. Such is the power commanded by a woman practicing the austerity of chastity. There are numerous examples of such women famous for their chastity and Sita was one of them.

VIII. THE TALE OF RAMA YANA

Lord Brahma then went on to describe the famous tale of Ramayana the mere listening to which absolves a man from all his sins. He began by

giving the details of Sri Ram's lineage and said—'I (Lord Brahma) manifested from the Lotus originating from the navel of Lord Vishnu. Sage Marich manifested from me while Kashyap was Marich's son. Surya manifested from Kashyap, Vaivaswat-Manu from Surya and Ikshavaku was born to Vaivaswat-Manu. The great King Raghu was also the descendant of Ikshavaku. Raghu's son was Aja, whose son was Dasharath.

Dasharath had three queens-Kaushalya, Kaikeyi and Sumitra. Kaushalya gave birth to Sri Ram while Kaikeyi was the mother of Bharata. Sumitra had two sons-Lakshman and Shatrughan.

Sri Ram had great devotion towards his parents. Sage Vishwamitra, who was tormented by the demons, took Sri Ram and Lakshman along with him so that he could do his penance peacefully. He assured Dashrath that he would make both his sons proficient in all the scriptures as well as in the usage of various weapons. With great reluctance, Dasharath allowed Sri Ram and Lakshman to go along with Vishwamitra.

Once in the forest Sri Ram assured his Guru to do his penance without bothering about the demons. Vishwamitra commenced his penance and Sri Ram killed all the demons trying to disturb him. The names of few demons killed by Sri Ram were Tadaka, Subahu, etc.

Janaka, the father of Sita had organized a grand 'Swayamvar' ceremony to which he had invited all the prominent kings of that time. He had also sent invitation to Vishwamitra. Vishwamitra set out for Janakapur accompanied by Sri Ram and Lakshman.

Janaka had a huge bow gifted to him by Lord Shiva and which he worshipped daily with appropriate ritual. Once during the process of cleaning the area where Shiva's bow was kept, Sita lifted the bow and kept it a distance. Later on she forgot to keep it back at the original place. When Janaka came to worship the bow he was surprised to find it to be kept at a different place. He made an inquiry and Sita confessed that she had kept it while cleaning the place of worship. Janaka just could not believe that his tender looking daughter possessed such strength and power. No wonder he decided to give Sita's hand in marriage to such a man who could break Shiva's bow. So, he made a declaration that anybody capable of breaking Shiva's bow could have Sita as his wife.

There were many mighty warriors present at the 'Swayamvar' ceremony but none had the strength to even lift the bow what to say about breaking it. Finally, as the destiny would have liked it, Sri Ram broke the bow into three pieces and thus married Sita. Lakshman married Urmila- another daughter of Dasharath while Bharata and Shatrughan married Mandavi and Keertimayi respectively, both daughters of King Kushadhwaja.

Later on, when Dasharath decided to crown Sri Ram as the King of Ayodhya, Kaikeyi played a spoilsport and demanded her son-Bharata to be made the King of Ayodhya and Sri Ram to be sent into exile for fourteen years. Actually, Kaikeyi had taken undue advantage of Dasharath's helpless condition to serve her own interest. Once, Dasharath was busy fighting a battle oblivious of the fact that one of the wheels of the chariot was about to eject from its axle as the nail supporting it had fallen off. Kaikeyi, who was also accompanying him, saved his life by preventing the wheel from falling off and thus maintaining the balance of the chariot. When Dasharath learnt how Kaikeyi had saved his life he promised to grant her two boons. At that time Kaikeyi did not ask for any thing and merely said that she would demand at the appropriate time. So, when the time for Ram's coronation came she thought it was the best opportunity for her to remind Dasharath about the two boons he had promised to grant her.

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Dasharath, bound by his deep love for Sri Ram on the one hand and by his vow on the other, agreed to Kaikeyi's demand with a heavy heart. Sri Ram without any hesitation followed his father's order and left for the forest. How could have Sita and Lakshman lived without him? So, they

too accompanied him to the forest. In course of his journey, Sri Ram passed by many holy places and finally after reaching Chitrakoot he made a 'Parna kuti' (hermitage made of leaves) and started living there.

The shock caused by Sri Ram's separation proved to be fatal for Dasharath, who died with an unfulfilled desire of having a glimpse of his dearest son. Bharata, who at that time was at his maternal uncle's place, returned to Ayodhya after hearing the news of his father's demise and performed his last rites. He then went to Chitrakoot and tried his level best to convince Sri Ram into returning back to Ayodhya. But, Sri Ram did not agree, as it was against his principle to disobey the commands of his father. Sri Ram gave his pair of wooden sandals to Bharata as a token of love and requested him to return to Ayodhya. Bharata returned to Ayodhya and kept Sri Ram's sandals on the throne. He then stationed himself at Nandigram- a city situated at the outskirts of Ayodhya and started ruling from there on behalf of his elder brother. He had vowed not to return to Ayodhya till the completion of Sri Ram's period of exile.

From Chitrakoot, Sri Ram reached Dandakaranya accompanied by Sita and Lakshman and started living in a hermitage made of leaves. There they also met prominent sages like Atri and Agastya. Once an ogress named 'Surpanakha' (Ravan's sister) attacked Sri Ram but Lakshman retaliated by severing both her ears as well as her nose. Surpanakha, badly injured and bleeding profusely, went to Khardushan and narrated her woeful tale. Khardushan attacked Sri Ram with a huge army consisting of fourteen thousand soldiers but lost all his men in the battle.

The revengeful Ravan went to the hermitage disguised as a hermit and abducted Sita while Sri Ram was away in pursuit of Marich-the golden deer. Actually, Marich was a demon, who had disguised himself as a golden deer on the instruction of Ravan so that Sita could be abducted successfully. Ravan knew quite well that it was impossible for him to abduct Sita in the presence of Sri Ram. So, he hatched a plan according to which Marich was to disguise himself as a golden deer and enchant Sita. Ravan was sure that Sita after being enchanted by the beauty of the golden deer would ask her husband to get it at any cost. Everything happened as per the plan of Ravan and he was successful in abducting Sita.

When Sri Ram did not find Sita in the hermitage he became worried and started searching for her frantically. On the way he met old Jatayu, who had got injured while trying to resist Ravan from taking away Sita. Jatayu informed him that Ravan had taken Sita towards south. Jatayu was so badly injured that he died soon after giving Sita's information to Sri Ram. Sri Ram performed his last rites and continued with his search. He proceeded towards south as per the instructions of Jatayu and reached 'Rishyamook' mountain where he met Sugriva, whom he befriended. He killed Bali, who harboured enemity against his brother- Sugriva. He then made Sugriva the King of 'Kishkindha' and himself went to live at 'Rishyamook' mountain.

Sugriva sent monkeys in all directions to find out Sita's whereabouts. Hanuman went towards south and with the help of Sampati managed to find out the exact location where Ravan had kept Sita. Hanuman took a giant leap and the next moment he found himself on the other side of the ocean. He went to 'Ashok Vatika' where Ravan had kept Sita in captivity. He presented the ring to her, which Sri Ram had given him. Sita, in turn gave her 'Chudamani' (ornament) and requested him to give it to Sri Ram. Jumping from one branch to another, hungry Hanuman ate all the fruits and in the process destroyed the beautiful garden. When Ravan came to know about the destruction caused in the beautiful garden of 'Ashok Vatika', he sent many demons to capture

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burnt the golden city of Lanka within no time. He then returned to his master Sri Ram and described everything in detail.

Finally, Sri Ram attacked Lanka with a huge army comprising of mighty warriors like Hanuman, Sugriva, Angad and many others. A fierce battle took place in which all the demons including Ravan were killed. The victorious Sri Ram returned to Ayodhya along with his consort Sita. The residents of Ayodhya danced in joy at the return of their prodigious son. Sri Ram ruled over Ayodhya for eleven thousand years. Finally he ascended to the heaven taking along all the people of Ayodhya with him but before doing that he appointed Lav and Kush-his sons, as his successors.

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IX. SHRI KRISHNA

Making a revelation to Vyasa that the Almighty God manifests himself whenever the civilization is endangered by the dominance of sinners,

Lord Brahma said— 'In Dwapar yuga, Lord Vishnu incarnated as Sri Krishna to protect Dharma from being subjugated by 'Adharma', which had become all pervasive at that time. He was bom to Vasudev and Devaki. Both his parents had been kept under captivity by Kansa, who was aware of the prophesy that he would be killed by Devaki's eighth son. In due course of time Devaki gave birth to seven sons all of whom were mercilessly killed by Kansa one by one. In order to protect the life of Sri Krishna- the eighth child born to Devaki, Vasudev exchanged him with the baby girl born to Yashoda and Nand. Vasudev had no problem in moving out of the prison as Krishna by his divine power induced all the guards to sleep.

Sri Krishna, being an incarnation of Lord Vishnu performed great feats right from his childhood. Once, Kansa sent an ogress named Putna, who tried to kill Sri Krishna by breast-feeding him. But, Krishna sucked her breasts with such ferocity that Putna met an instant death. In due course of time Sri Krishna killed many more ferocious demons like Shakatasur, Kaliya Nag, Dhenukasur and mesmerized the residents of Gokul by his divine bravery. He also performed many other divine feats like lifting Govardhan mountain and performing Ras-Lila with the Gopis. Seeing all his plans of killing Sri Krishna go in vain, Kansa sent him a message challenging for a duel- fought with his court-wrestlers named 'Mushtik' and 'Chanur'. Sri Krishna killed both the dreaded demons without much difficulty. Ultimately, Sri Krishna climbed up the throne sitting on which Ravan had been watching the wrestling bout and pulled him down by his hair. He then punched Kansa on his chest so hard that he died an instantaneous death.

Having accomplished his most important mission of killing the demon king-Kansa and liberating the earth from his tyranny, Sri Krishna went on to complete his education under the tutelage of Sage Sandipani. During ancient times it was customary for a disciple to offer Dakshina to his teacher, as a mark of respect after his education was complete. Sri Krishna following this tradition gave an invaluable Dakshina to his Guru by bringing all his dead sons alive to earth from 'Yamloka'.

Sri Krishna was subsequently crowned as the king of Mathura but on account of the relentless attack by Jarasandha he had to abandon his dear city and shift his base to Dwarka. He had eight queens among whom

Rukmini and Satyabhama were prominent. Later on he rescued sixteen thousand and one hundred women from the captivity of Narakasur and married all of them. From Rukmini he had a son named Pradyumna, who killed Shambarasur. Aniruddha was Pradyumna's son and he married Usha- daughter of Banasur. Banasur was a great devotee of Lord Shiva and was blessed with one thousand hands.

Lord Shiva came to his rescue at the time when he was battling against the might of Sri Krishna. A fierce battle was fought between both the deities, which remained inconclusive even after a long time. Lord Shiva then requested Sri Krishna to spare Banasur's life to which he agreed albeit partially. Sri Krishna severed all the hands of Banasur barring two. Finally, after accomplishing his mission of liberating the earth from the darkness of sin Sri Krishna left for heavenly abode.

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X. THE TALE OF MAHABHARATA

Giving the reasons that lead to the great battle of Mahabharata, Lord Brahma told sage Vyasa that Sri Krishna had planned this great battle

and executed it to perfection to relieve the earth from the burden of tyrants. While giving the names of lineal ascendants of Kauravas and Pandavas, he said—'I (Lord Brahma) manifested from the lotus which itself had its origin in the navel of Vishnu. Atri manifested from me while Chandra from Atri. Buddh was born to Chandra while he himself was the father of Pururava. Ayu was Pururava's son while he himself was the son of Yayati.

The names of few famous descendants of Yayati were Bharata, Kuru and Shantanu. Shantanu had two wives- Ganga and Satyavati. The former was the mother of Bhishma, the indomitable warrior, who had vowed to remain a bachelor throughout his life. The latter i.e. Satyavati gave birth to two sons- Chitrangad and Vichitraveerya. A Gandharva killed Chitrangad while Vichitraveerya died issue-less despite having two wives- Ambika and Ambalika (both daughters of the king of Kashi). In order to expand their clan both Ambika and Ambalika begot one son each from sage Vyasa. Ambika gave birth to Dhritrashtra while Ambalika to Pandu. The same Vyasa also had a son from a maid servant who became famous as Vidur and who was famous for his statesmanship and tactfulness.

Dhritrashtra married Gandhari and begot one hundred sons from her among whom Duryodhan was most notorious. These one hundred sons of Dhritrashtra became famous as Kauravas. Pandu had two wives Kunti and Madri from whom he begot five sons-Yudhisthira, Bhima, Arjun, Nakul and Sahdev, who all grew up to be very powerful and mighty. All five of them became famous as Pandavas. Pandu, their father had died while they were still young and Madri, unable to bear the sorrow had given up her life by jumping into the burning pyre of her dead husband. So, the Pandavas were brought up under the guardianship of Kunti.

Kauravas and Pandavas were bitter rivals right from their childhood. Duryodhan never missed a chance to torment the Pandavas- his cousins. Both Kauravas and Pandavas were brought up under the tutelage of Kripacharya and Dronacharya, both prominent scholars of their times. Once, Duryodhan tried to kill Bhima by poisoning him but fortunately Bhima not only came out unscathed but also with renewed strength and vigour. Duryodhan tried his luck for the second time to eliminate his enemies by setting ablaze the house of wax in which Pandavas were living but once again they came out unharmed. Pandavas then went to

'Ekchakra Nagar' and took refuge in the house of a Brahmin family. A demon named 'Baka' used to torment the people of Ekchakra Nagar. Bhima killed that demon and the people were relieved at the news of their tormentor's death. Thereafter Pandavas went to attend the Swayamvar ceremony of Draupadi. Arjun won Draupadi as his wife by piercing the eye of the fish hanged above his head by looking at its image in the water-pot kept below.

At the insistence of Dronacharya and Bhishma, Yudhisthira reluctantly agreed to share half of his Kingdom with the Pandavas. Thus Pandavas started living at Indraprashth, the capital of their newly acquired Kingdom.

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Kauravas and Pandavas were bitter rivals right from their childhood. Duryodhan never missed a chance to torment the Pandavas- his cousins. Both Kauravas and Pandavas were brought up under the tutelage of Kripacharya and Dronacharya, both prominent scholars of their times. Once, Duryodhan tried to kill Bhima by poisoning him but fortunately Bhima not only came out unscathed but also with renewed strength and vigour. Duryodhan tried his luck for the second time to eliminate his enemies by setting ablaze the house of wax in which Pandavas were living but once again they came out unharmed. Pandavas then went to 'Ekchakra Nagar' and took refuge in the house of a Brahmin family. A demon named 'Baka' used to torment the people of Ekchakra Nagar. Bhima killed that demon and the people were relieved at the news of their tormentor's death. Thereafter Pandavas went to attend the Swayamvar ceremony of Draupadi. Arjun won Draupadi as his wife by piercing the eye of the fish hanged above his head by looking at its image in the water-pot kept below.

At the insistence of Dronacharya and Bhishma, Yudhisthira reluctantly agreed to share half of his Kingdom with the Pandavas. Thus Pandavas started living at Indraprashth, the capital of their newly acquired Kingdom.

Arjuna married Subhadra, his second wife and the sister of Sri Krishna. He pleased Agni Dev by his austere penance and received divine weapons like- a divine chariot, Gandiv (bow), imperishable arrows and an impenetrable shield. After being armed with these divine weapons he

successfully defeated many powerful monarchies and gave the whole acquired wealth to Yudhisthira, his elder brother.

Dhrithrashtra invited Yudhisthira for a game of 'Dyuta' (gamble) but Duryodhan defeated him by employing unfair and deceitful tactics with the active connivance of Shakuni- his cunning maternal uncle. Yudhisthira lost everything in the gamble- his whole wealth, his kingdom and even Draupadi. Pandavas had to go into exile for twelve years with an additional year of 'Agyatwas' (they were not supposed to be recognized during this period) as per the terms and conditions laid down for the game.

After completing their total period of exile, Pandavas reached Virat Nagar to spend their year of 'Agyatwas', which posed more dangers and challenges because if they were recognized during this period it would have meant another twelve years of exile for them.

Having successfully completed their period of exile, Pandavas demanded back their Kingdom but Duryodhan was not even willing to part away with five villages. Thus Pandavas were left with no option but to fight for their legitimate rights. Both the rival armies boasted of mighty and brave warriors on their sides.

Duryodhan appointed Bhishma as the chief commander of his army whereas Shikhandi was leading Pandava's army. The first ten days of the battle saw a fierce fight between both the rival armies during which period many warriors from each side achieved martyrdom. Finally, while Bhishma lay down injured, his whole body pierced with Arjuna's arrows, but still alive because he had received a boon of 'Iccha Mrityu' (death by his choice) prominent warriors from both sides stood around him. It was only after the Sun came north of equinox (Uttarayan), the auspicious time Bhishma had chosen to leave his mortal body that he died after preaching the Pandavas on wide range of subjects.

After Bhishma's death Dronacharya led the Kaurava's army. This was the most crucial phase of the battle. Dronacharya had become so demoralized after his son's death, that he had just no motivation left in him to fight the battle. Finding an opportune moment, Dhrishtadyumna severed his head and Kauravas thus lost their most able and experienced commander.

Duryodhan appointed Kama as the next commander of Kaurava's army. The most decisive phase of the battle began and after a fierce battle of two days Arjuna managed to kill his brave rival. Subsequently, Yudhisthira killed Shalya.

After loosing all his mighty warriors, Duryodhana, in a fit of rage challenged Bhima for a duel of mace. Bhima killed him after a fierce fight. The revengeful Ashwatthama, son of Dronacharya, attacked the Pandava's camp at night, much against the norms of battle and killed all the five sons of Draupadi and thousand of other Pandava soldiers. Arjuna avenged the death of his sons by defeating Ashwatthama and extracting the diamond set in his forehead.

After the battle ended, Yudhisthira performed the rituals of Shraddh in the name of all the dead warriors and ascended the throne. He ruled in a just manner just according to the instructions given by Bhishma. After Sri Krishna left this mortal world, Yudhisthira appointed Parikshit as his successor and left for Himalaya accompanied by his brothers as well as Draupadi.

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XI. THE ETERNAL TRUTH

Lord Brahma, while shedding light on various aspects of religion told sage Vyasa that a man should look at his sorrows (shoka) with a sense of

aloofness and detachment, considering it as a passing phase. He also revealed to Vyasa that the 'fire of sorrow' consumed everything that came into its fold and nothing remained untouched by it. A sorrowful man becomes bereft of all his possessions-knowledge, religion, physical strength, patience, happiness and all such qualities.

Lord Brahma also told him that virtuous deeds never went without being rewarded, as all good things enjoyed by a man in his life are nothing but the result of his virtuous past 'Karmas'. On the contrary sinful deeds committed by a man makes his present as well as his future births miserable. Further, glorifying the virtues of some other good deeds, Lord Brahma said-' Protecting the life of a person, whose life is endangered and who has sought one's refuge is the greatest virtue and no other deed can be compared with it. One who sheds his life to protect his religion attains to heaven.

A contented man enjoys even his adversities and remains unperturbed by them. A man should never miss a chance to get benefited by the company of enlightened souls because it gives him an opportunity to understand religion in a better way. Donating food begets incomparable virtues and no other virtuous deed stands anywhere near it.'

Lord Brahma concluded by describing Sanatan Dharma in a nutshell and said-' Anybody observing the following austerities should be considered an ardent follower of 'Sanatan Dharma'-truth, penance, self-control, purity, forgiveness, compassion, knowledge and donation.

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THE SUPREME YOGA

Once, Sage Shaunak asked Sutji about the reasons behind man's sorrow. Sutji told him that man's ego and his attachments to this mortal world

were the two most important causes for his sorrow and until he gets rid of them he will continue to suffer. Sutji said-' The 'tree of ignorance' sprouts from the seed of 'egotism' and it receives its nutrition from sensual pleasures. Only those who possess the 'axe of knowledge' are successful in felling this 'tree of ignorance' and experience the ecstasy of Divine bliss. Once a man has experienced this divine bliss he not only becomes free from all kinds of sorrow but is also freed from the cycles of birth, death and rebirth. This divine link which a man establishes with the Almighty is called 'Mahayoga' (the supreme Yoga). But, those unfortunate people who have not experienced this divine bliss continue to get trapped by the worldly illusions leading to their countless births and deaths.'

Sutji then went on to describe the means by which a man can have a pure heart and said-' Austerities like meditation, worship, fasts, oblations, charity, etc., certainly helps a man in getting rid of all kinds of impurities.'

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DEVOTION-THE PATH LEADING TO ALMIGHTY

Glorifying devotion as the simplest means to reach God, Sutji told Shaunak that there was nothing else that pleased God more than the

unflinching devotion of his devotee in him. Sutji said— 'A devotee who chants the holy name of God acquires imperishable virtues and attains salvation even if he were a lowly sinner. One who has surrendered himself to the will of God is absolved of all his sins. Even 'Yamaraj'- The lord of death has strictly instructed his escorts to spare those who are devotees of Lord Vishnu. Lord Vishnu himself has declared that anybody having total devotion in him should be considered as the most virtuous soul even if he had committed the most heinous of sins.'

Lurther hailing the glory of chanting Lord Vishnu's name Sutji said-' The mere chanting of Lord Vishnu's name in 'Kali yuga' brings the same virtue what the combined virtues of meditating on him during 'Satya yuga', chanting his sacred mantras during 'Treta yuga' and worshipping him during 'Dwapar yuga' brought. A devotee who has nothing but the sacred name of Lord Vishnu on his lips is certain to attain to Vishnuloka after becoming free from the bondage of this world. Chanting the divine name of Vishnu even in dreams is believed to absolve a man of all his sins then what to say about people who consciously chant his holy name while they are awake.'

Thus Sutji told Sage Shaunak that anybody could attain salvation by simply having total devotion in Lord Vishnu as it was the most simplest path leading to the Almighty.

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XII. THE DIVINE STROTRAS

NRISINHA STOTRA

Telling about the origin of this stotra, Sutji said—'Lord Shiva had created this stotra praising the glory of Lord Nrisinha and invoking him to protect the world from the wrath of Matrikas. The stotra goes as follows —

Namastestu Jagannath Narsinha Vapurdhar;

Daiteshwar Endra Sanharinakha Bhukti Virajit.

Nakh Mandal Sambhinna Hempingal Vigrah;

Namostu Padmanabhay Shobahanay Jagadguro.

Kalp Antambho Danighosh Suryakoti Samprabha;

Sahastra Yam Santras Sahastrendra Parakram.

Sahastra Dhandasfeet Sahastra Charanatmaka;

Sahastra Chandra Pratim Sahastransu Harikram.

Sahastra Rudra Tejaska Sahastra Brahma Sanstut;

Sahastra Rudra Sanjat Sahastra Aksha Nirikshana.

Sahastra Janma Mathana Sahastra Bandh Mochan;

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KULAMRIT STOTRA

Sage Narada once asked Lord Shiva about the means by which a man could become free from the delusions of the world. Lord Shiva revealed to

him the contents of 'Kulamrit stotra', eulogizing the majesty of Lord Vishnu. By chanting this stotra, Narada successfully attained to that supreme status, which even the most enlightened souls can only dream of. One who eulogizes Lord Vishnu by chanting this stotra, becomes liberated from all the bondage of the world. The stotra goes as follows —

Yastu Vishwamana Dyanta Majamatmani Sansthitam;

Sarvagya Machalam Vishnum Sada Dhyayet Sa Muchyet.

Devam Garbho Chitam Vishnum Sada Dhyayen Vimuchyet;

Ashariram Vidhataram Sarvagyan Manoratim.

Achalam Sarvagam Vishnum Sada Dhyayen Vimuchyet;

Nirvikalpam Nirabhasam Nishprapancham Niramayam.

Vasudevam Gurum Vishnum Sada Dhyayen Vimuchyet;

Sarvatkam Cha Vai Yavadatma Chaitanya Rupakam.

Shubham Ekaksharam Vishnum Sada Dhyayen Vimuchyet;

Vamyatitam Trikalagyam Vishvesham Loksakshinam.

Sarva Smadyutam Vishnum Sada Dhyayen Vimuchyet;

Brahmadi Deva Gandharvai Munibhih Siddha Charanaih.

Yogibhih Sevitam Vishnum Sada Dhyayen Vimuchyet;

Sansar Bandhanan Mukti Michhamleko Dhya Sheshatah.

Stutvaivam Varadam Vishnum Sada Dhyayen Vimuchyet;

Sansar Bandhanat Kopi Mukti Michchhan Samahitah.

Anant Matyayam Devam Vishnum Vishva Pratishthitim;

Vishveshwar Masaram Vishnum Sada Dhyayan Vimuchyet.

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MRITYU ASHTAK STOTRA

Describing the origin of this stotra, Sutji said— 'Lord Vishnu himself had taught this powerful stotra to Sage Markandeya. The daily chanting of

this powerful mantra had enabled Markandeya to conquer death. One who daily chants this stotra thrice a day enjoys a long life and never dies a premature death. The stotra goes as follows —

Damodaram Prapannosmi Kinno Mrityuh Karishyati;

Shankh Chakra Dharam Devam Vyakta Rupin Matyayam.

Adhokshajam Prapannosmi Kinno Mrityuh Karishyati;

Varaham Vamanam Vishnum Narsiham Janardanam.

Madhavam Cha Prapannosmi Kinno Mrityuh Karishyati;

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Loknatham Prapannosmi Kinno Mrityuh Karishyati;

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XIII. SALVATION THROUGH YOGA

Sutji told Sage Shaunak that the ultimate aim of a man's life was to attain salvation. A man can not attain salvation until and unless he has seen

through the trappings of the worldly illusions. Sutji said—'Practice of Yoga helps a man to live in this world with a sense of detachment and to successfully avoid the allurements of this mortal world. Yoga comprises of six organs:

Pranayamaa (Breathing exercises), Japa (chanting), Pratyahara (restraining sense organs), Dharana (resolution), Dhyana (meditation), and Samadhi (deep meditation).

Not running after sensual pleasures by having self control helps a man in diminishing his sins and diminishment of sins pleases the deities who give blessings. Blessings of deities help a man to attain salvation. Pranayama, an important part of Yoga is of two types-'Garbha' and 'Agarbha'. Pranayama, done with simultaneous chanting of a mantra is called 'Garbha' whereas in 'Agarbha' Pranayama mantras are not chanted.

It is natural for a man to get attracted by worldly pleasures and checking this tendency of the mind is called 'Pratyahara'. It is not easy to control the mind and concentrate on anything for a long time but 'Dharana' helps a man to do that. When a man has successfully controlled his sensual desires, then it becomes very easy for him to concentrate his mind. A concentrated mind finds it easy to meditate. When he has mastered meditation it is not much difficult for him to enter into the deep state of meditation i.e. 'Samadhi'. In the state of 'Samadhi', all sense of dualism cease to exist as one establishes divine link with the Almighty, which helps him in experiencing indescribable divine bliss.

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SELF REALIZATION

Once, on being asked by Sage Narada about the means that helped a man in attaining self realization, Lord Vishnu told him that only those

privileged few who have understood the impermanent nature of this world and have successfully controlled their sensual desires can attain self realization. All the mysteries of this Universe are unraveled to a man of self realization and he attains salvation. Lord Vishnu said-' It should be the prime objective of a man to make incessant efforts so that he can experience this divine knowledge of self realization-the real knowledge, for every other kind of knowledge is superficial and of least significance.'

Lord Vishnu went on to describe how self realization could be attained—

'Yadasarve Vimuchyante Kama Yeshya Hridi Sthitah;

Tadamrit Twa Mapnopati Jivanneva Na Sanshayah.

Meaning— When there is no desire left in the heart then a man is certain to experience the divine taste of this nectar (self realization) in his life time— and there is no doubt about it.

Unraveling the mystery of Universe to Sage Narada, Lord Vishnu said —'Brahman is the cause behind this universe and one who has understood this fact can be rightly called a man of self realization. A man being under the influence of his sensual perceptions falsely believes this world to be real and is unable to understand the real cause behind the existence of this world, which is not the case with a man of self realization. Instead of searching 'without' a man should seek 'within' because within him exists the Universe just like our sense organs perceive them externally. The whole mystery of Universe is unraveled to a man who makes incessant efforts to undertake this inner journey for if his efforts are made with a pure heart and a firm determination then he is sure to reach his goal of self realization one day or the other. The soul (Atma) is Brahman but this fact becomes apparent only to those privileged few, who have attained self realization. Self realization illuminates the soul in the same way just as a lightning illuminates the dark sky at night.'

Lord Vishnu went on to describe himself in the following words—'I am Pure and beyond the limits of human intelligence. I am beyond the confinement of three basic qualities (Satva guna, Rajas guna and Tamas guna). Only he can experience Me who possesses an enlightened soul

because I manifest Myself in the heart of every individual as a divine effulgence in order to drive away the darkness which engulfs it.'

SELF REALIZATION

Once, on being asked by Sage Narada about the means that helped a man in attaining self realization, Lord Vishnu told him that only those privileged few who have understood the impermanent nature of this world and have successfully controlled their sensual desires can attain self realization. All the mysteries of this Universe are unraveled to a man of self realization and he attains salvation. Lord Vishnu said-' It should be the prime objective of a man to make incessant efforts so that he can experience this divine knowledge of self realization-the real knowledge, for every other kind of knowledge is superficial and of least significance.'

Lord Vishnu went on to describe how self realization could be attained--

'Yadasarve Vimuchyante Kama Yeshya Hridi Sthitah;

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Anybody who studies the sacred texts of 'Brahma-Gita' is certain to attain salvation for it brilliantly propounds the theory of divinity of man by proclaiming that in each individual dwells Brahman-the supreme Almighty. Eulogizing the glory of 'Brahma Gita' Lord Vishnu said— 'Brahma-Gita declares that in each individual dwells Brahman and one who has understood this fact becomes free from the bondage of the world i.e. attains salvation. Nobody can deny the fact that God exists because the Almighty manifests himself all around us in various forms both perceptible and imperceptible. All the five elements (space, air, water, fire and earth) are nothing but the manifestations of Almighty God.'

'Unfortunately, most of the people are unaware of the presence of divinity in them- the existence of Brahman in each of them. The reason for this is not much difficult to comprehend because this fact is so subtle that only enlightened souls can experience it. HE lies dormant and cannot be experienced until and unless He is awakened by means of austerities and penance. Brahman is ever present in a man and does not abandon him in any of the three states of his consciousness-while he is awake, while he is dreaming or even while he is asleep.

Despite being present in every individual he still remains unaffected by his deeds because by nature He is eternally pure. One more reason why man is unable to feel the presence of Brahman in himself is his own ego, with which he falsely develops deep association. So, a person who is desirous of realizing God must first subdue his ego so that Brahman manifests himself in all his glory. Without subduing his 'ego' a man can never realize God because the sense of dualism is the greatest impediment in the path of God realization and 'egotism' only strengthen this sense of dualism.'

'Once man has successfully subdued his ego, the dawning of God realization becomes imminent because Brahman now has no problem in manifesting himself in the changed scenario. Brahman who is absolute truth, eternally pure and the supreme Almighty. He is the eternal bliss dwelling in each individual- the realization which made the Vedas to proclaim 'Tatvam Asi'(Thou is me) and who is beyond the confinement of time and space.'

Ultimately, Lord Vishnu revealed to Sage Narada that Brahman whose

glory he had praised was none other than himself.

BRAHMA-GITA

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XIV. GARUDA QUERIES

Sutji once reached the forest of 'Naimisharanya' in course of his journey. Naimisharanya was a holy place where sages and hermits went to do penance. After reaching there Sutji met many prominent sages who were pleased at his arrival. They took it as a God sent opportunity to get their doubts cleared on the mystery called death and what exactly happened after a man died.

Sage Shaunak, one of those sages, asked Sutji—'O Revered Sage! We were just awaiting your arrival. It seems God has listened to our prayer. We are confused by so many diverse and contradictory opinions expressed on the mystery of 'death' and what happens after death. Some people are of the belief that a man takes rebirth soon after his death whereas there are some who believe that a man after his death first goes to 'Yamloka' to taste the fruits of his 'Karmas' and only then he takes rebirth. We request you to clear our doubts and enlighten us on the mystery called death.'

Sutji recounted the tale of Garuda, who had once posed the same query to Lord Krishna. While narrating the tale, Sutji said- 'Garuda-son of Vinta, once decided to get a first hand experience of all the three 'Lokas' (worlds). After visiting all the three worlds he returned to 'Vaikuntha loka' and narrated his experiences to Lord Krishna.

Garuda said— 'After visiting all the three 'Lokas' I found the Earth (Prithvi) little overcrowded as compared to other 'Lokas'. I also found that it provided better opportunities to a man both for materialistic enjoyments as well as his spiritual advancement. So, I have come to the conclusion that 'Prithviloka' was the best of all the 'Lokas' in every respect. But, all round prevalence of sorrow and misery in 'Prithvi loka' made me sad.

I was really perplexed to see people performing complex rituals after the death of their relative. All these rituals appeared so absurd to me. I was really amazed to see people laying down their dead relatives on the ground. I could also not understand why a dead body is laid on the bed of 'kusha' grass and sesame seeds. I witnessed so many rituals that surprised me, for instance I could not understand the reason why donations are made after a man dies. I am puzzled by the mystery called death or, what becomes of him after he dies.

The sight of sons lifting the dead body of their father on their shoulders is still fresh in my memory. I could not understand the reason why 'ghee' (clarified butter) is applied on a dead body or why the relatives of the deceased chant 'Yama sukta' facing north. I was also surprised to see the son of the deceased being debarred from having meal along with his other relatives. O Lord! Please reveal to me the significance of making 'pinda dan' or, the significance of 'tarpan' rituals? Please tell me the proper method of offering 'pinda dan' and invoking ancestors? I find it hard to believe that all the deeds virtuous or evil committed by a man follows him after his death.'

This way Garuda flooded Lord Krishna with a barrage of questions and sought clarifications on them.

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SALVATION THROUGH RITUALS

Lord Krishna replied—"I am so delighted that you have asked such important questions for the benefit of mankind. I am revealing to you the

secrets, which were hitherto unknown even to the deities and yogis. O Garuda! A man should try to beget a son with the help of means as mentioned in the scriptures because there is no salvation for a person bereft of son."

Lord Krishna then went on to describe the proper rituals which are performed after the death of a man and said-"First of all, the area should be purified by coating it with a layer of cow-dung. This purified area is called 'mandal' and it is graced by the presence of the 'Trinity'— Brahma, Shiva and Myself. Sesame seeds are then sprinkled on the purified area and kusha grass is spread. A person whose death is imminent is then laid down on the bed of kusha grass. Scriptures say that a person who does not leave his mortal body in the above mentioned way, wanders hither and thither in the form of a restless spirit. No amount of rituals can put such a soul to rest. O Garuda! Sesame seed has manifested from my sweat and hence is extremely pure. All kind of evil forces like, ghosts, spirits, demons, etc. keep away from the place where it is used.

Similarly, Kusha grass has manifested from my body hair and is graced by the presence of 'Trinity'— Brahma, Shiva and Vishnu. Deities are satisfied if kusha grass is offered to them while ancestors are satisfied by the offerings of sesame seeds. Scriptures say that if dying man is laid down on the bed of kusha grass spread on the land purified by cow-dung, he becomes absolved of all his sins. There is a great significance of donating salt after the death of a person. Salt owes its origin to Me and donating it helps ancestors in attaining heaven. Donating salt also helps in reducing the pain and sufferings of a dying man and this is why it is donated along with other articles after a death of a person. The relatives of the deceased should chant the sacred 'Yama sukta' facing north because it helps him to attain liberation." Lord Krishna then explained to Garuda the appropriate way of carrying the corpse to the cremation ground-"The dead body should be carried to the cremation ground by the sons an other relatives of the deceased. In the cremation ground the dead body should be kept in such a way that it's head should be either towards east or north. The pyre should be made either of sandal or 'palash' wood."

Describing the experiences of the soul when it leaves the body, Lord Krishna said—"The soul leaves the mortal body with great reluctance because the attachment with the mortal world exists even after his death.

Yamdoots, descend down to earth to take the soul of the dying man to Yama loka. Those who have committed grave sins are tied with ropes and taken to Yama loka with great humiliation but virtuous souls are taken with honour and due respect. Yamraj- the lord of death receives the virtuous soul with all the honour and respect and metes out punishment to those who had committed sins during their lives.

In his dark complexion and with a buffalo as his mount and with a noose and iron stick in his hands, Yamraj appears terrifying. On the other hand, the sight of lifeless body appears disgusting and people try to dispose it off as quickly as possible because it is worthless without a soul. So, one must try to make the best use of this mortal body by indulging in good deeds before the day of his final journey arrives otherwise he would be left with nothing but regrets at the time of his death.

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DEATH AND AFTER

Continuing with his narration, Lord Krishna said—"O Garuda! Death comes at the predetermined time, which remains fixed and unaltered

under all circumstances. A man's sense organs become weak and his body feeble, which gets inflicted with numerous diseases in his old age. At the time of his death, man experiences unbearable pain and he begins to loose his consciousness. Yamdoots arrive and begin to retrieve the soul from the body and this aggravates the pain. Ultimately, the soul, which is not more than the size of a thumb, reluctantly comes out from the body as the attachment with the world exists even after his death. But, a virtuous person does not go through all these painful experiences at the time of his death. The soul has to take birth in different species as well as go through cycles of countless births, deaths and rebirths in order to taste the fruits of his Karmas.

Describing the significance of 'Pinda dan' rituals, Lord Vishnu told Garuda that they are performed so that manes are satiated. He also revealed to him that six pinda dans are offered to the manes while performing the rituals of last rites— "The first 'pinda-dan' is made at the place where person has breathed his last while the second, third, fourth, fifth and sixth 'Pinda dans' are made at the main entrance of the house, the nearest cross-roads, the cremation ground, on the pyre itself and at the time of collecting last remains (Asthi) respectively.

After reaching the cremation ground the dead body should be laid down with its head towards south. The mortal body then should be consigned to flames and after some time sesame seeds and ghee should be poured into the burning pyre so that it continues to bum without any problem. For the next ten days the relatives coming from the same gotra of the deceased should observe a period of 'Ashaucha'- a period during which he observes strict austerities and avoids social contacts. The son of the deceased is prohibited from having food along with his relatives simply because he is believed to be impure during this period."

This way, being satisfied by Lord Krishna's answers, Garuda thanked him for clearing whatever doubts he had in his mind. Lord Krishna blessed him.

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